

**SECTION ONE**

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***THE FOUNDATION***

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# ***COUNSELING ETHICS AND THE BIG PICTURE***

*Let us toast twice. First to the older generation: May your days come to be many, full of comfort and understanding. May they be spent knowing that those days past have held a completeness uncommon and unknown to many, and that every detail of your beings continues in the lives of those who follow.*

*To the younger: May we accept these gifts, knowing that they are of this tradition, of this old-fashioned courage, of ethics, and that they can be carried along forever like rusting relics, or they can be worn as wings.*

*Let us wear them as wings.*

—Terry Tempest Williams

## **CHAPTER ORIENTATION**

To be perfectly honest (which we are compelled to be since this *is* an ethics text) we know this chapter and the next will present you with challenges, ideas, and material not commonly included in your run-of-the-mill applied ethics text. And we are not apologizing for this, although we will be very understanding if you contact us or complain to your instructor that you find little relevance in learning to pronounce *deontological* or *nonmaleficence*. We hope that by the end of this text, you will agree with us that this material is worth the time and brain expansion necessary to absorb a bit of it. For now, our overall explanation is this: We love our profession and believe it has a central role to play in the future health and well-being of many societies. Professional helping entails a powerful interaction that can be of great benefit or great harm. For the sake of our profession, those we serve, and the future nature of those interactions, we ask you to bear with us and delve thoughtfully into the content in these first two chapters. *You* are the next generation of practicing professionals and, knowingly or by default, you will shape the ethics and professional identities of future helping professions. As Alasdair MacIntyre (1998b) said, “Understanding the world of morality and changing it are far from incompatible tasks” (p. 2).

This chapter explores applied and philosophical connections between morals, ethics, principles, and values, and concludes by linking this inquiry to your professional identity as a counselor. You will be considering:

- the definitions of the words *ethics* and *morals*;
- the role of ethics in the professions;

- the role of morality in human culture;
- the concept of universal morals;
- the issues surrounding global human rights;
- the definitions of moral values, rules, and principles;
- common ground in the helping professions;
- the role of professional organizations and associations; and
- the definition of the client, or the people we serve.

## DEFINING THE TERMS

### Ethics and Morals

Will you be a moral professional? Will you be an ethical professional? Is there a difference? Can you be both? Etymologically speaking, these terms have ancient Greek and Latin roots, which we discuss in the following paragraphs, but the struggle to define the rightly lived life and the best ways to live together as a human community is even more ancient. Very early texts, such as the Hebrew *Torah* (Fasching & deChant, 2001) or the Hindu *Rig Gita* (Brannigan, 2005), include treatises on human relationships with each other, nature, and the sacred.

As Robert Wright explores in his book, *The Moral Animal* (1994), morality may even be a genetic adaptation, enabling human survival and evolution. Humans are social animals. Psychologically, spiritually, and physically, our survival depends on getting along with other humans to some extent. Customs or rules for how to best treat each other are evident in even the most loosely defined communities, but the rules themselves and the penalties for breaking them vary radically across time and culture. Chapter 2 provides a glimpse into some of these diverse customs, theories, and practices.

The terms morals and ethics have similar origins; both were related to norms or customs in society. More specifically, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *morals* is derived from the Latin word *mores*, which means “manners, morals, character” (1981, p. 900). The word *ethics* comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means character, or custom.

Although there is overlap in meaning, in general, the terms *morals* and *morality* have become more closely associated with values and matters of conscience, while the term *ethics* has come to be more closely associated with the business and professional world. For example, many trades and professions have codes of ethics, but not codes of morals. Another distinction between these two terms is that, in one sense of the meaning, ethics is the study of morality, much like political science is the study of politics, or theology is the study of religion. Thus, college courses in ethics are common, but you might do a double take if you were required to take “Morals 101”—or even worse, “Morals for Dummies.”

Both ethics and morals refer to behaviors that some collective of human beings has agreed to be good, or right ways of being. *Ethics* tends to be the term used when professionals of some sort describe how “good” practitioners behave. *Morals* tends to be the term used more generally to describe good or right human behavior.

## Morality, Ethics, and Essence

There is a parallel between professional ethics and the broader concept of human morality. Professional ethics defines professional identity—something we cover thoroughly in the second half of this chapter. At the very core, our ethics demand that counselors know how to effectively and safely use the skills and talents involved in offering counseling. From a constructivist perspective, ethics codes and practices articulate the good, effective, counselor narrative (Mahoney, 2003).

Following this parallel, morality defines the good human. Morality is the story of what it means to be fully human, realizing all that is good and true in human potential. “Good and just societies require a narrative . . . which helps them know the truth about existence and fight the constant temptation to self-deception” (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 18). Given this centrality, we should take a closer look at both professional ethics and human morality because “moral knowledge is necessary for the functioning of society” (Kavathatzopoulos, 2005, p. 277).

## THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN THE PROFESSIONS

In the course of becoming professionals, people learn specific sets of skills. Dentists learn basic medical material and then learn all about teeth. Teachers learn about their subject area and specific skills for teaching others. Learning the *ethics* of how the skills are applied is an important aspect of this skill acquisition. That is, what is the best and most correct and effective way to use the knowledge that defines the profession? These rules define the heart of professional endeavor and identity. There are codes of ethics for attorneys, architects, chemists, counselors, dentists, nurses, scientists, zoologists, and many more.

Some argue that without a code of ethics, a profession has not yet fully come into being (T. Remley & Herlihy, 2005). Further, if professionals decide to ignore or violate their particular ethics code, they run the risk of being shunned, sanctioned, or removed from their profession. Learning to be an ethical practitioner has been compared to the process humans go through as they become members of a new culture (Handelsman, Gottlieb, & Knapp, 2005). Using Berry’s (2003) model, which identifies four possible adaptation strategies people use when faced with joining a new culture, Handelsman, Gottlieb, and Knapp (2005) describe four ways you, as a new member of the counseling culture, might adapt. These include:

1. *Assimilation.* When people assimilate into a new culture, they embrace the new culture so fully they lose their connections to their original culture. Handelsman, Gottlieb, and Knapp (2005) point out that assimilated mental health professionals might overly identify with the external trappings of the profession, believing credentials are more important than the substance of the profession. They might follow the ethics codes religiously without ever grasping the broader principles involved. This can lead to simplistic or legalistic application of the codes, and a failure to seek the higher ground and the best possible ethical practices and solutions.
2. *Separation.* When new mental health professionals choose separation as their adaptation to their new professional culture, they allow their original personal val-

ues to overrule what they are learning as a new professional. They might be strongly committed religious people, or devoted environmentalists, unable or unwilling to integrate this new set of values into their ways of being in the world. They may discount the importance of the new ethics, believing their own moral systems to be preferable. Those who maintain this separation often fail to understand the harm that can come from applying their values under the umbrella of the new identity. The counselor/environmentalist who scolds clients for not recycling or the helping professional with religious values who shames parents for sending their children to public schools instead of home-schooling them are behaving unethically in their new professional culture.

3. *Marginalization*. “Marginalization is the most problematic acculturation strategy, comprising low identification with both cultures” (Handelsman et al., 2005, p. 61). Graduate students who have not developed an optimal sense of moral identity in their personal lives, and who minimize or ignore the ethics of the professional culture they are joining, are at great risk for unethical behavior. They might get along with an ethics-as-convenient style for some time, but without any real allegiance to the ideal of professional and moral excellence, they are highly likely to break as many rules as they can get away with.

4. *Integration*. Integration involves retaining your sense of self, as a person, while also adopting the new culture in an authentic way. Becoming an ethical counselor will include adopting some new values, new guidelines, and new goals. Integrated mental health professionals also find ways to maintain their own values and senses of meaning in the world. Integration allows “a richer, more sophisticated appreciation for the underlying principles of both cultures” (Handelsman et al., 2005, p. 59).

Obviously, integration is the form of adaptation we hope you eventually achieve. However, cultural adaptation is a process, not an end-state. You may see yourself in each of these descriptions, sometimes overidentified, sometimes underidentified, and sometimes just confused. Be patient with yourself as you explore this professional culture you are joining, and the new layers of ethical identity that come with it. But do not underestimate the importance of this ethical identity. In our opinion, it is what defines our craft. See the unusual example in Digressions for Deliberation 1.1.

## THE ROLE OF MORALITY IN HUMAN CULTURE

*Human communities are essentially units of morality.*

—Warren Lancaster

As soon as infant humans are born into their respective cultures, moral instruction begins. Caretakers in different cultures react to infants’ needs with a wide variety of responses, sending important messages about how and when to ask for food, comfort, or even diaper changes! As these children (and their consciences) grow and develop, they become increasingly aware of the rules for conduct in their families, communities, and societies. There are decades of research focusing on how adults can teach children

### Digressions for Deliberation 1.1

#### Shooting Isn't Necessarily Hunting

Some years ago, we helped a (vegetarian!) colleague facilitate a workshop on Hunting Ethics. There were a number of hunters present who believed fervently that there were moral behaviors that distinguished ethical hunting from simply killing an animal. Merely shooting something did not make someone a hunter. Abiding by the rules of the hunt, having an attitude of respect and gratitude, obeying the law and the rules of safety, having the skills and training necessary, and putting these ethics above all else makes someone a hunter.

You may not believe in hunting. You may not even eat the cellophane-wrapped chicken, beef, pork, or lamb produced by the feedlot-slaughter cycle. But bear with us: The definitive value these hunters place on ethical practices offers an analogy for mental health counseling. Bartenders, hairdressers, and even the occasional mother-in-law offer a sympathetic ear; they listen, reflect, and offer thoughts or advice. Often, they are quite effective in their efforts to help. But are they mental health professionals? They do not have the training, the credentials, or a code of ethics guiding their “mental health” interactions and protecting those who receive their services. They might be natural helpers, but because they are not aware of, or obliged to, follow a code of professional counseling ethics, they are not professional counselors or psychologists. They might, however, have a code of ethics for bartending or hairdressing. This code would focus on the essence of safe, effective bartending and hairdressing—not on effective counseling or therapy.

Those who fail to follow hunting ethics are not considered to be hunters by those who do. Those who fail to follow the ethics codes and expectations of many other professions are also excluded from claiming membership in the profession. Ethical behavior is central to professional identity.

moral values most efficiently (Casey & Burton, 1982; Gibbs, 2003; Jensen & Buhanan, 1974; McGrath, 1923).

Just as ethical practices and codes define a profession, moral rules serve a defining role in human culture. People who cannot or do not behave in ways their culture has prescribed as good or right are sometimes seen as less than full members of their culture. In some cases their autonomy, freedom to move about, or access to the culture is cut off. Words that describe immoral behaviors include the word *inhuman*—an acknowledgment of the definitional power of morality. If you break central moral rules, your culture may cast you out, or define you as less than human (Allport, 1954; Craig, 2002).

When teaching ethics, we ask students to complete a survey (found in Chapter 2) about their own personal moral and ethical principles. For now, we ask you to consider this: “Who taught you about right and wrong?” Or, put another way, “Where did you learn about what behaviors are more acceptable and desirable and what behaviors are less acceptable and desirable in your culture, family, and society in general?”

In response to these questions, most students name their parents and other early

adult caretakers or role models as original moral authorities in their lives. This tendency has been true for most students from diverse cultural backgrounds and different age groups. Although some students occasionally cite a religious authority (or religious text), the vast majority cite parents, followed by grandparents, siblings, or other family members. Sometimes, teachers or coaches make it on the list as well. These early figures are very influential. In fact, when he teaches the ethics of family therapy, Sam Gladding has his students do an “Ethical Genogram” (Gladding, 2005b) to compare and contrast the ethical approaches of our close family members.

As you study counseling ethics, you will find that you already have a moral and ethical foundation and that by taking an ethics course and reading this text, you are merely building on your existing foundation. In the future, when you are faced with an ethical dilemma, you will be influenced both by those original authorities in your life as well as the layers you have added since then. When faced with an ethical question or quandary, mental health professionals often turn to the following resources:

- an immediate colleague or supervisor (if available)
- a colleague who is also a friend
- former ethics professor or counseling/psychology professor
- a local authority (e.g., university professor, county mental health professional, school superintendent)
- the state counseling or psychological association (state associations sometimes will put you in contact with their attorney)
- a local attorney familiar with psychology and counseling practice law
- the ethics committees of various professional organizations

When you face a challenging ethical situation, to whom will you turn? Who do you think most professionals turn to? Check with your professors and classmates to see how your answers compare.

Obviously, human morality intersects directly with multiculturalism. If behaving morally is part of the definition of being human, and at least some moral rules vary across cultures, cross-cultural encounters might be confusing or even disturbing for those unprepared for these central differences. Further, as we discuss in the following paragraphs, most of us believe in at least some small degree of moral absolutism—the idea that there are moral behaviors that are the same for all times and all people. When our moral norms are violated by cultures very different than ours, we might be tempted to define whole cultures of humans as immoral or less than human. This is painfully evident in times of conflict, war, and terrorism, when enemies are dehumanized to justify the aggression directed toward them. The social psychology literature has articulated this dehumanization process (Craig, 2002; Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952).

So, to underline the parallel, professional ethics codes define the essence of what it means to be a good professional. Analogously, and in a much more profound way, morality defines the essence of what it means to be a worthy member of the human race—and this morality is at least partially defined by the particular cultures and communities in which we live.



We all have beliefs in accordance with which we judge actions and characters, our own and those of others, to be right or wrong, good or bad; we have aspirations which we strive to realize; and we have a conception, dim or clear, of the best way to live. (Albert, Denise, & Peterfreund, 1975, p. 3)

### Pause for Reflection

*At this point, do you think your sense of human morality will be compatible with your ethical responsibilities as a professional? Do you know, or can you imagine, a professional who is quite ethical at work, but behaves immorally after hours?*

## ARE THERE UNIVERSAL MORALS?

One reason we decided to write this text is our strong belief in the importance of human diversity in understanding ethics. Humans are, to add a bit to the psalmist's observations, fearfully, wonderfully, *and* diversely made (Metzger & Murphy, 1994, p. 793). The vast, intriguing expanse of human variation should feature prominently as we consider the ethics of professional counseling. On the other hand, if morality is intended to point us toward the best of what it means to be human, could we hope to find agreement across cultures regarding certain aspects of morality?

### Tensions between Relativism and Absolutism

There are natural tensions between diversity and commonality that parallel the intellectual tension between relativism and absolutism. Both provide us with an ongoing, productive dialectic to consider (see the section below for an explanation of the concept of dialectic). As someone once said, "Everything is relative, and of that, I am absolutely certain." In the 1950s, interpersonal theorist and early constructivist Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) wrote

Man [*sic*] is much more simply human than otherwise. . . . We are really up against one of the most difficult of human performances—organizing thought about oneself and others, not on the basis of the unique individual **me** that is perhaps one's most valuable possession, but on the basis of one's common humanity. (p. 4)

As counselors, we need not deny our shared humanity in service of exploring and celebrating diversity, and we need not fear or minimize diversity as we seek to understand our commonality.

### The Dialectic of the Moral Life

One definition of the term *dialectic* is "the Hegelian process of change in which a concept or its realization passes over and into and is preserved and fulfilled by its opposite" (Woolf, 1973, p. 350). The study of ethics and our attempts to live a moral life cause all of us to face many uncomfortably paradoxical or contradictory truths. Among them are:

- I know the right thing to do, and yet, I do not do it.
- There are two “right” things to do.
- There are no purely right things to do—the choice is between the lesser of evils.
- If I do the right thing, I will hurt the people I love.
- The right thing to do will turn out to be wrong and harmful because of an inadequate judicial system or lack of funding.
- If I tell the truth, I will hurt someone’s feelings or will be misunderstood by others.

Humans have to contend with both heart and mind. Some are more inclined to set their moral compass by their intuitions and a deep, gut-level sense of morality. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “Do what you feel in your heart to be right—for you’ll be criticized anyway.” Others use the human gift of rationality. They reason their way to the moral choice. Either way, the human condition is such that we will never achieve perfect consistency. As Walt Whitman wrote, “Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)”

Barry Lopez offers the following in his book *Arctic Dreams* (1986):

No culture has yet solved the dilemma each has faced with the growth of a conscious mind: how to live a moral and compassionate existence when one is fully aware of the blood, the horror inherent in life, when one finds darkness not only in one’s culture but within one-self? If there is a stage at which an individual life becomes truly adult, it must be when one grasps the irony in its unfolding and accepts responsibility for a life lived in the midst of such paradox. One must live in the middle of contradiction, because if all contradiction were eliminated at once life would collapse. There are simply no answers to some of the great pressing questions. You continue to live them out, making your life a worthy expression of leaning into the light. (p. 413)

In Chapter 4, we encourage you to consider your own and your culture’s values as they intersect with those of your clients. There is no doubt you will find significant differences in values between yourself and your clients, even when you share similar cultural backgrounds and worldviews. At times, this will be difficult. Even more difficult is grappling with the notion that two very different values can be worthy of respect *and* correct in their own context.

### Pause for Reflection

*Thomas Jefferson said, “The same act, therefore, may be useful and consequently virtuous in one country which is injurious and vicious in another differently circumstanced” (Boyd, 1950, p. 143). What is the most radical moral difference you can think of between your own culture and another culture? Dare we consider suicide? In the United States, suicide is most commonly considered a tragic or difficult ending to an unhappy, terminally-ill, or angry person’s life (Cutchin & Churchill, 1997; Lester, 1997). While we may be understanding of, or experience compassion for, this act, there is little to no honor associated with choosing to commit suicide within the dominant culture in the United States. The mindset necessary to become a kamikaze*

(tokubetsu) pilot or suicide bomber is a mystery to most Westerners, and the honor given to suicide bombers by their culture is horrifying to many. This example is provocative and extreme, but when you consider even mild differences, can you feel the tug to judge our way of doing things as right, or moral—and their way of doing things as wrong? Can you feel the door to inquiry and understanding slam shut when faced with such disturbing differences?

*Living with and tolerating ambiguity is part of professional life for most counselors. Scaturo (2002) wrote “. . . an ability to think and function within the finer gray hues of life, rather than either the black or white polarities, tends to be a job requirement of the psychotherapist” (p. 117).*

## GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

The current focus on global human rights is an international attempt to articulate values common to *all* humans. Most of us have heard the term, but few have stopped to consider exactly what is meant by *human rights*. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is provided in the Appendix. Eleanor Roosevelt played a key role in bringing this document into being. It was written under the auspices of the United Nations in 1948, on the heels of World War II and one of the most horrific of the genocidal holocausts humans have visited upon each other.

Over the years, other human rights documents have followed the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, including a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, which can be viewed at <http://www.unhchr.ch/indigenous/main.html>, and one detailing the rights of children at <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.html>. Visit these websites and look around. These conventions and declarations are attempts to reach an agreement about how human beings should treat each other across cultures, races, nationalities, religions, and socioeconomic conditions. Not everyone agrees with these efforts. As you read through the original Universal Declaration of Human Rights or look at the text of the other declarations, think about which of the articles or statements you find yourself agreeing with. Which seem to reflect cultural bias or outdated ideas? Which seem hopelessly idealistic? Which ones do you philosophically disagree with? What is still missing?

Within the national professional mental and physical health organizations, there are divisions devoted to global peace concerns and social justice, such as APA's Division 48, the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence; NASW's division, Social and Economic Justice and Peace; or ACA's Counselors for Social Justice (CSJ). On their web page, CSJ is described as “a community of counselors, counselor educators, graduate students, and school and community leaders who seek equity and an end to oppression and injustice affecting clients, students, counselors, families, communities, schools, workplaces, governments, and other social and institutional systems.” The web page indicates a list of commitments, some of which include:

- challenging oppressive systems of power and privilege
- disseminating social justice scholarship about sociopolitical and economic inequities facing counselors and clients/students in schools and communities

- maintaining an active support network online and in person for engaging in social justice activities in schools and communities

Influencing public policy at the local, national, or international level is increasingly seen as a dimension of professional practice—topics ranging from torture to environmental toxins have direct implications for our clients and the world in which we live (Koger, Schettler, & Weiss, 2005). Perhaps more than most professionals, counselors and other mental health professionals must directly face the demands of reaching across many cultural divides when offering services. In fact, if you cannot reach effectively across a given culture, you not only have nothing to offer the client on the other side, you may cause more damage than improvement. As counselors, we need to live in the tension between honoring diversity and seeking common connection. Dimensions of diversity include cultural, racial, religious, socioeconomic, gender and sexual differences, disabilities, and many others too subtle to easily label. Dimensions of commonality rest in the human-to-human encounters we experience—the essence of any counseling relationship.

## MORAL VALUES, RULES, AND PRINCIPLES

The term *moral values* has been used frequently in recent public and political discourse. For our purposes, moral values reflect beliefs about how people *should* behave in order to coexist in a just society, and have a good or satisfying life. Of course, morality overlaps with religion, but *religious values* are not necessarily synonymous with *moral values*.

Moral values are pervasive. “. . . [B]ecause our every action has a universal dimension, a potential impact on others’ happiness, ethics are necessary as a means to ensure that we do not harm others” (Tenzin Gyatso [the 14th Dalai Lama], 1999). It is hard to imagine many behaviors that have absolutely no moral dimension. General moral values include respect for others, compassion, tolerance, honesty, generosity, fidelity, kindness, fairness, forgiveness, and justice. However, achieving agreement on what constitutes specific moral behavior, such as what sort of action is a true representation of “compassion,” is an ongoing challenge and sometimes the focus of heated arguments.

### Pause for Reflection

*“Our beliefs about ourselves in relation to the world around us are the roots of our values, and our values determine not only our immediate actions, but also, over the course of time, the form of our society” (Stapp, 1993, p. 209). Many believe that respecting and striving for equal rights for all is the core task of a moral government. Do you? Think for a moment about how you define morality and what exact behaviors you believe are representative of moral behavior.*

Moral values can also be expressed at the community level. When moral values are shared, this can lead to the establishment of moral rules or laws for a given group of people. The rule is intended to ensure that the value is upheld in the community. Moral rules may or may not become laws that society is willing to enforce. Some moral rules

are explicit, sometimes taking the form of law, while others are implicit. Societies vary widely in the form and extent of enforcement of moral behaviors.

Further complicating the situation, the term *moral principles* has a different meaning than moral rules or values. According to Michael Brannigan, “. . . moral rules are concrete expressions of underlying moral principles. Moral rules are therefore derived from moral principles and are of the second order. Moral principles are of the first order” (2005, p. 13). You catch the sense of this meaning in this 1853 quote by abolitionist and historian, William C. Nell (1852): “I have borne allegiance to principles, rather than men.” For Nell, even though owning slaves was legal by human-made laws, at a higher level, it was wrong based on moral principles that transcended law. After reading Chapter 2, you will be articulate in overarching principles that flow from some of the various ethical theories and approaches in ways guaranteed to impress your friends and family.

In summary, *morals* have to do with defining right or good human conduct in general. *Ethics* has come to be associated more closely with professional conduct. In fact, having a set of behavioral guidelines called an ethics code has become a defining feature of professionalism. Therefore, professional identity is an important component of any ethics inquiry, and an important aspect of your development as a graduate student.

## PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY: POWER AND PERIL

Developing a professional identity is an exhilarating, arduous, and intimidating process (Kreisler, 2005; Weinrach, Thomas, & Fong, 2001). Although many of us might feel ambivalent about the status and responsibilities associated with professional identity, there is no denying that being a professional brings a certain amount of social power. The following quote by Paul Starr in his book *The Social Origins of Professional Sovereignty* (1982) provides a view of the social process that gives professionals distinct power and authority.

Power, at the most rudimentary personal level, originates in dependence, and the power of the professionals primarily originates in dependence upon their knowledge and competence. In some cases, this dependence may be entirely subjective, but no matter: Psychological dependence is as real in its consequences as any other kind. Indeed, what makes dependence on the professions so distinctive today is that their interpretations often govern our understanding of the world and our own experience. To most of us, this power seems legitimate: When professionals claim to be authoritative about the nature of reality, whether it is the structure of the atom, the ego, or the universe, we generally defer to their judgment. (p. 4)

While society may believe the power invested in professionals is legitimate, graduate students often struggle with the process of acquiring this power. Quite recently, one of our school counseling students began an advanced internship placement at a small school that was temporarily without a counselor. As our student was leaving after his first day there, the principal made a point to come out, shake his hand, and say, “It’s sure nice to have an expert around here again.” In class, the student told this story

with a mixture of shock, fear, and awe in his voice. His fellow students laughed nervously as they considered how very soon, each of them would be finding jobs wherein they would be seen as experts. Taking on the authority imbued in you by virtue of your graduate degree may feel uncomfortable at first. You may feel like an imposter, trying to look and act like a professional while inside feeling uncertain, confused, or even a little afraid.

On my internship, I (RSF) admitted similar feelings to a wise and experienced supervisor, Dr. Orin Bolstad. He said, “Hang on to that insecurity. It isn’t comfortable, but it’s what will keep you safe. It’s what will make you continue to grow and develop your entire life. It will make you seek consultation. I don’t trust people who think they’ve arrived or know it all—and furthermore, I don’t think they make the best counselors” (Bolstad, personal communication, November 1988).

The act of engaging in a helping relationship as a professional helper has ramifications for all parties involved. To become and remain an ethical counselor, you must continually examine your motivations for acquiring and using the kind of power described in the previous quote.

### Pause for Reflection

*Perhaps unfortunately, counseling graduate students are unlikely to have enormous monetary gain as their primary motive. So, great wealth aside, what other forms of power or authority do you associate with counseling? Does it seem strange to consider counseling as a powerful profession?*

## ATTRIBUTES OF PROFESSIONAL HELPING: COMMON GROUND

Defining exactly what is meant by “professional” is difficult, but there are a number of commonly agreed-upon attributes (Greenwood, 1983). These include:

- a set of skills defined or driven by a theoretical foundation and a prescribed level of educational attainment
- a degree of authority and autonomy in exercising the practice
- a code of ethics or a generally understood set of ethical expectations
- an orientation toward serving the common good
- organizations or associations that foster the culture of the profession
- state or community sanction evidenced by certification or licensure

Providing professional help through the provision of therapy, counseling, and/or social work services is a relatively new set of professional activities. Professional mental health and school counseling, at the applied masters level, embody a multitude of related professional skills and identities (Gladding, 2004; Heppner, Kivlighan, Wright, Pledge, et al., 1995). Both social work and nursing programs produce masters level graduates who provide mental health counseling to clients, and there are doctoral level

psychology programs with clinical, counseling, and developmental applied emphases. We discuss these distinctions more fully in Chapters 11 and 12. Is there enough professional common ground to write an ethics book applicable across these domains?

Although exactly what should be taught in graduate ethics classes for helping professionals is still a somewhat open question (Urofsky & Sowa, 2004), we believe there is significant common ground to explore. At the core of this enterprise we call counseling is an attempt to be of professional help to other human beings. We might be helping them overcome a disability or trauma. We might be helping them become better students, finding their way toward fulfilling careers. We might be offering to help someone on his or her spiritual journey. We might be helping a family find healthier ways to communicate and get along. We might be helping people recognize the ways they are affected by society, empowering them to seek both healing and social change.

These counseling activities all share similar expectations for educational attainment. They also share the needs for theoretical foundations and a core of common skills (J. Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2004b), as well as skills distinct to the disciplines and specialties. Professional helpers may vary in the tools they use and the types of needs they address, and they may have different orientations.

## PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

We are advocates of lifelong membership in professional organizations. There are a number of reasons that membership in national organizations, along with state and regional membership, is essential for the profession and the professional. Professional organizations define, develop, and defend the profession itself, and the members within them. Professional organizations are the source of ethics codes and promote the ongoing development of ethical thinking and revision. These organizations give the profession a voice in national debates over issues relevant to the profession—such as salary, insurance coverage and reimbursement, professional stature and limitations, and national and state policy affecting our clients' lives as well as our own.

The publications and conferences of national organizations provide forums for dissemination of research and scholarly endeavors and for connection with other professionals. They also offer opportunities for continuing education. Ethical professionals never stop growing, learning, debating, questioning, and developing—and professional organizations are central to these processes.

The American Counseling Association (ACA) began in 1952, although as it has grown and developed, it has gone through a few name changes. It began as an amalgamation of four independent associations: The National Vocational Guidance Association, the National Association of Guidance and Counselor Trainers, the Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education, and the American College Personnel Association. These groups joined together with the intention of gaining a larger professional membership and voice. They named this new organization the American Personnel and Guidance Association. The name later changed to the American Association for Counseling and Development and, in 1992, the American Counseling Association. ACA is a national organization encompassing 18 different divisions with one organizational

affiliate. We encourage you to visit the ACA website and review the divisions and other information you will find there.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) was formed in 1955 by consolidating seven related professional organizations. These sister organizations had been formed for social workers who engaged in group, psychiatric, school, medical, and community social work practices (NASW, 2006). By combining into one large national organization, these groups gained strength to address the educational and political issues facing the social work profession overall. The NASW currently has 56 chapters in the United States and other countries.

The American Psychological Association (APA) began in 1892, founded by G. Stanley Hall, long before the professions of clinical or counselor psychology came into being (MacFarlane & Nierman, 2005). It currently has 53 divisions with interests and emphases ranging widely. As is true with ACA, it is possible to be a member of a division within the APA without necessarily being a member of the parent organization. Again, a visit to the website is a most interesting excursion for developing professionals.

Regardless of your training background or the kind of work you eventually do, professional identity is foundational to ethically informed and clinically responsible practice. The identity infighting among mental health professionals, which we discuss in later chapters, will probably continue throughout our professional lives. However, there is common ground to share in our efforts to responsibly and ethically meet the enormous mental health and educational needs in our cultures.

## AND WHO IS THE CLIENT?

Now that we have explored various aspects of professional identity for those who provide professional counseling, it is time to turn our attention to those we serve. The heading for this section may seem a bit self-evident, but in reality this becomes an ethically salient question for many counselors.

Some time ago, we conducted a workshop on ethics for rehabilitation counselors. The participants worked for a variety of employers, including government, private for-profit companies, and nonprofit companies. One issue they wanted to discuss was: Who is our client? State or federal government? The company? Our community? Society itself? The person we've been asked to evaluate or counsel? Places of employment where people were injured? The person with a disability or injury?

School counselors frequently ask similar questions, generating a slightly different list of potential "clients." This list might include students, teachers, administrators, parents, or the community (Mitchell, Disque, & Robertson, 2002). It gets even more complex when one considers teaching, forensic work, consultation, and supervision. One reason the "Who is the client?" question is so germane to ethics is that ethics codes do not necessarily offer a clear definition of the term *client*. Consequently, counselors who wish to behave ethically need clarity on their legal and ethical obligations to all stakeholders in their professional work.

A common assumption is that a client is someone who pays a professional for a certain kind of services. "Counseling and psychotherapy clients purchase counseling ser-



## Deepening Diversity 1.1

### Client or Visitor?

In Mandarin, as is probably true of many languages, there is no direct translation for the word *client* as it is commonly used in the mental health professions. Some years ago, we discovered that our clinical interviewing text had been translated into Mandarin when a few complimentary copies showed up in the mail (J. Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2003). Luckily, a bilingual friend of ours was able to look through the text and share with us some of the translation decisions that had been made. She indicated that the word *client* had been translated into a word in Mandarin that would be translated back into English as *visitor*. She explained that the options were limited. There is a Mandarin word for business relationships that would translate as *client*, but its connotations would not capture the sense of the helping relationship. There is a Mandarin word for a person who is seeking medical help, similar to our word *patient*, but that would not have conveyed the nature of the counseling relationship either. Counseling, as a professional activity, barely exists in China. As the profession develops there, perhaps new words will capture a culturally appropriate meaning for the participants in a professional counseling relationship in China. Until then, at least when it comes to the use of our text in China, clients will be known as visitors.

vices (either directly or indirectly)” (Welfel, 2006, p. 103). However, the reality is much more complex than the old Nixon-era Deep Throat guidance of “Follow the money” (Woodward & Bernstein, 1994). The English word *client* comes from the Latin root *clinare*, which means to lean, or incline toward. We believe the true identity of the client is insinuated in this root meaning.

Our contention is this: While there are many stake-holders, employers, groups, and institutions all connected to the work of the counselor, the true meaning of the word *client* is the one who is in need of the counseling assistance—the person in the office with you, or the people to whom you go to offer guidance and facilitation of growth and development. Although you may be paid by a completely different entity, your primary ethical obligation is for the welfare of the human being(s) you have been hired to, or have chosen to, assist.

We cover the specifics of ethical obligations to different kinds of clients later in this book. However, it is important to note that you undoubtedly will have times in your professional life when you will face an ethical quandary—your employer, or society, has goals for, or wants an outcome from, your counseling work that does not match one or more of the following:

- the goals or outcome desired by your client;
- the goals or outcome you believe to be better for your client; or
- the reality of the timeline and resources you have to work within.

**Case Example:** Cammy’s probation officer suggested that she could end her probation earlier if she agreed to go to counseling. In fact, he located a community fund to pay your fee if Cammy agrees to get the counseling. However, the probation officer insists that he be provided with all case notes and regularly informed of Cammy’s progress. You meet with Cammy and quickly realize that she has been in a number of abusive relationships, and comes from an enmeshed, intrusive family system. You firmly believe that Cammy will need to be able to disclose things from her past that you will not want to share with the probation officer. The probation officer found the money to hire you. Is he, in any way, your client? Do you owe him anything?

**Case Example:** Trey is a kindergartener who has occasional problems with enuresis. The kindergarten teacher is worried about the odor, stigma, and the disruption. She wants Trey to meet with you to solve this problem. Trey’s mother, having been shamed as a youth due to her enuresis problems, insists there is no problem because wetting one’s pants on occasion is perfectly normal. She wants you to work with Trey to understand that he should not be ashamed of wetting his pants. The principal at your school has a small discretionary fund that could be used for a medical consultation, but Trey’s mother is unwilling to have Trey visit a traditional physician. She does not believe in “organized medicine.” Trey doesn’t like visiting you and refuses to engage in any conversation about his wet pants. Again, who is your client? Who are you working for? Who most needs your help?

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If there were simple ethically and clinically correct answers to these scenarios, we would happily share them with you. However, there are many questions that would need to be asked and answered before a clinically wise and ethically sensitive decision could be made in each case. Our wish at this point is simply to raise the sticky issues associated with the work of the counselor for both the “identified” client and the other forces and interests involved. The clients in the previous cases, by our definition, are Cammy and Trey, but there are clearly many people and institutions affected by the interventions you might use, the direction the counseling takes, and the decisions you make.

Writing about the need for professional integrity, Mumford, Connelly, and Leritz (2005) note that social interventions and social exchanges involve multiple parties who have different concerns and different needs. The professional must decide whose needs and what needs must be served. “One of the ways to solve the ambiguity of competing needs and the tensions that arise between personal and social gains is to apply norms and codes of ethics” (p. 223).

### Pause for Reflection

*Robert Kinscherff, JD, PhD, former chair of APA’s Ethics Committee, said: “Instead of worrying about the ways [they] can get in trouble, psychologists should think about ethics as a way of asking ‘How can I be even better in my practice?’ Good ethical practice is good professional practice, which is good risk management practice” (D. Smith, 2003, p. 50). Throughout this text, how can you translate ethics into*

*identity and practice? Keep this quote in mind, and see, by the end of your ethics course, if you agree with Dr. Kinscherff.*

## CHAPTER WRAP-UP

In this chapter, we began the acculturation process that will hopefully result in integrated ethical professional counselors. These are the key points:

- The terms *ethics* and *morals* have common original meanings. A society is defined by its morality; a profession, by its ethics.
- Becoming an ethical professional is a process and a journey, requiring continuing thought and education.
- Professional identity involves socially sanctioned power and corresponding obligations. This can be a bit intimidating.
- Professional identity is stabilized and enhanced by professional membership in one's professional organizations.
- Counselors realize they serve a large constituency and are accountable to many, but must also keep in mind who the client is.

Stanley Hauerwas (1981) wrote:

The plurality of communities, moreover helps to explain the peculiar moral power of the traditional professions. If every polity derives from a corresponding training in virtue, the professions must be regarded as some of the few remaining coherent polities. That is why, in spite of claims of moral neutrality, medical and law schools survive as the closest modern analogs to the ancient schools of virtue. In the commitment to their clients' welfare through the practice of developed skills, they exemplify a training in virtue from which they derive profound self-esteem. That is why their professions become the source of their identity and justification, as occupation is one of the few areas in life which leads itself to exposition. (p. 126)

We hope this text and your ethics course serve to instill such a profound sense of professional identity and commitment to client welfare that counseling, too, will someday be listed among the professions that serve as “analog to the ancient schools of virtue.”